

March 6, 2000

***GAMBLING ON STUDENT ATHLETES:  
A FLAGRANT FOUL***

Dear Colleague:

March has traditionally been one of the most exciting months in collegiate athletics. We all take a certain sense of pride in our states and schools during this time known as "March Madness." However, as we sit back with our friends and families and watch the NCAA National Championship Tournament, we should not forget the unseemly influences that gambling has on our student athletes.

It was just two years ago during the Final Four that we learned of a point shaving scandal at Northwestern University involving the mens basketball team. This scandal involved both legal and illegal gambling on several Northwestern games. In fact, Kevin Pendergast, a former Notre Dame place-kicker who orchestrated the basketball point-shaving scandal at Northwestern University, has stated that he would have never been able to pull his scheme off without the ability to legally lay a large amount of money on the Las Vegas sports books.

Gambling scandals involving student athletes have become all too common over the past 10 years. In fact, there have been more point-shaving scandals on our colleges and universities in the 1990's than in every other decade before it combined. These scandals are a direct result of an increase in gambling on amateur sports. It is for this reason that I have introduced S. 2021, the High School and College Gambling Prohibition Act, a bipartisan bill that seeks to protect the integrity of high school and college sports and reduce the indecorous influences that gambling has on our student athletes.

The High School and College Gambling Prohibition Act is in direct response to recommendation made by the National Gambling Impact Study Commission (NGISC), which last year concluded a two-year study on the impact of legalized gambling on our country. The recommendation called for a ban on all legalized gambling on amateur sports and is supported by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which represents more than 1000 colleges and universities nationwide. This bipartisan bill will prohibit all legalized gambling on high school and college sports, as well as the Summer and Winter Olympic Games.

This legislation serves notice that betting on college games or amateur athletes is not only inappropriate but can result in significant social costs. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission recognized the potential harm of legalized gambling by stating that sports gambling "can serve as gateway behavior for adolescent gamblers, and can devastate individuals and careers."

I agree with the conclusions made by the Commission. It is inappropriate to bet on the athletics success of America's young people. Point-shaving schemes and other activities to "fix" the outcome of games is the direct result of the abundance of legal and illegal betting on college sports. This nation's college and university system is one of our greatest assets. We offer the world the model for post secondary education. Gambling on the outcome of college sporting events tarnishes the integrity of sports and diminishes the esteem in which we and the rest of the world hold America's post secondary institutions. This legislation, if enacted will remove the

ambiguity that surrounds gambling on college sports and make it clearly illegal in all fifty states.

The gambling industry has claimed that this is a state issue, not a federal one. This argument doesn't hold water. Congress already determined this is a federal issue with the passage of Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) in 1992. Ironically, while Nevada is the only state where legal gambling on collegiate and Olympic sporting events occurs, Nevada's own gaming regulations prohibit gambling on any of Nevada's teams because of the potential to jeopardize the integrity of those sporting events.

I am a strong advocate of state's rights. However, state's rights means a state's authority to determine how best to govern within that state's own boundaries -- not the authority to set laws that allow a state to impose its policies on every other state while exempting itself. Gambling on college sports, both legal and illegal, threatens the integrity of the game -- and that threat extends beyond any one state's border.

The frequency of point shaving scandals over the last decade is a clear indication that legal gambling on college sports stretches beyond the borders of Nevada, impacting the integrity of other state's sporting events. Two of the most recent scandals involved large amounts of money wagered in Nevada on teams at Arizona State University and Northwestern. I can imagine no greater blight on a college or university than that of a scandal involving players shaving points or fixing the outcome of a game. While I understand the Nevada casinos have previously cooperated in prosecuting this illegal activity, they could not prevent it from occurring. In order to begin to prevent future point shaving scandals from occurring, we must close the loophole in PASPA.

The gambling industry has tried to discredit our efforts by insisting that we should be focusing our efforts on curbing illegal gambling, not legal. I agree that we should be looking at ways to help law enforcement and institutions for higher education combat illegal gambling. Legislation has already been introduced that creates a panel to investigate and make recommendations with respect to illegal gambling. I am supportive of these efforts, but the fact remains that gambling on student athletes, whether legal or illegal, threatens the integrity of college sports. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission spent two years studying the effects of legalized gambling and my bill is in response to their recommendation.

This legislation has broad support from coaches, teachers, athletic directors, commissioners, university presidents, school principals and family groups from across the country. It is obvious that the integrity of college sporting events is not just threatened within the state of Nevada, but all over the country. This legislation will remove the ambiguity that surrounds gambling on college sports and make it clearly illegal in all fifty states. We should not wait for another point shaving scandal in order to act.

If you would like to join the 18 other senators who have cosponsored S. 2021, or if you have any questions, please contact Brian Henneberry at 4-8959.

Sincerely,

Sam Brownback  
United States Senator

